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World Chronicle

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49TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ROSARIO GREENE, United Nations Assistant-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, reflects on a wide range of issues concerning the work of the 49th regular session of the UN General Assembly. The GA is the organ of the world organization where all member states are equally represented. Democracy is a prerequisite for achieving economic and social development. The Agenda for Development is one of the major items disscused by the 49th General Assembly. People tend to single out UN shortcomings in certain peace-keeping operations and neglect its achievments in many other areas. The role of regional groups in the work of the GA is as important now as it was during the cold war era.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

On the third Tuesday of September every year, the United Nations General Assembly opens its regular session. World leaders converge on UN Headquarters in New York to state their countries' views on a wide range of issues, from disarmament to development and from peace-keeping to regional and national security. The General Assembly opened its forty-ninth regular session with more than 150 items on its agenda.

Our guest today has attended most of the meetings of this General Assembly. She is Rosario Green, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Joining me to talk with Ms. Green are Anthony Goodman of Reuters and Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London. Ms. Green, welcome to World Chronicle.

Ambassador Green -- I address you as Ambassador because that was your office before you came to the UN as an Ambassador of Mexico -- the General Assembly opened in 1946, the very first session in London, with 51 Member States. Now, half a century later in New York, we have 185 Member States, the latest being Palau in the Pacific, a small country in the Pacific, and this enormous list of agenda items. Tell us a bit about these agenda items that the General Assembly is dealing with.

GREEN: Well, many of these agenda items, of course, were very important. But I would say that a lot of the General Debate was concentrated on development -- social and economic development. Actually, the Secretary-General had put forward his Agenda for Development, and that was an issue very much debated -- development as the real foundation for peace, security, progress and harmony.

LITTLEJOHNS: I think the Secretary-General said something to the effect that without development there could be no lasting peace, didn't he?

GREEN: That's correct. You remember that a couple of years ago he put forward his Agenda for Peace, and he was dealing there with all the political conditions for peace; he was dealing there with preventive diplomacy, with peace-keeping, peace-building. And on this occasion two years later he decided to put forward this new document. And both of them combined really are the foundations for a better world. We do believe so.

LITTLEJOHNS: You're an Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Would you consider development to be a political question?

GREEN: Well, in many ways it is a political question. Of course, we are talking here about social and economic development, and you could say, well, that's the economic sphere, what about the political sphere? But what we are really talking about is institution building.

Development -- social and economic development need an institutional background. And dealing with peace, with institution building, with the creation of all the factors that are needed to sustain development, we deal with political issues, or just democracy.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the UN agenda for 1995, there's a summit session on social questions.* How does that fit into the development picture?

GREEN: It fits very well, actually. This is one of the reasons why this summit is taking place very soon in Copenhagen, and it is so because the Secretary-General wants to draw the world's attention to the fact that what we do here in the United Nations is not only peace-keeping operations, but also many other aspects that are integral parts of peace. You know that only 30 per cent of the activities of this house really have to do with peace-keeping, and the 70 per cent that is the rest of the 100 per cent has to do with codification of international law, with social development, with economic development. So what we're trying to do is to bring to the attention of the international community the need to be very much aware that peace, security, and political, economic and social development are a continuum, and that they constitute the whole unit and the whole foundation of stability.

GOODMAN: Ambassador Green, would you subscribe to the theory that the General Assembly with its 185 members is largely, say, a diplomatic safety valve where people make generalized speeches and let off steam and score points, but when it comes to serious negotiation they have to go to other fora, not necessarily just the Security Council, but more specialized fora, since ambassadors on the whole are not, say, all economists or all arms experts, and that the serious work has to be done elsewhere?

LITTLEJOHNS: The General Assembly's too general, perhaps?

GOODMAN: Actually, right.

GREEN: Well, I guess that the most democratic expression probably of what we do is the General Assembly indeed, because, as you well said, there are 185 members there, and they are all entitled to the same possibility of a vote. And, therefore, it's also the forum where we get everything, not only afterwards, but we provoke many of these instances. For instance, in this General Assembly we have been able to create two working groups which are very important, one working group to keep on discussing the Agenda for Development, and another working group to keep on discussing the financial crisis of the Organization. Both of them are presided over by the President of the General Assembly. So it's not only that we get issues from other bodies, but we also provoke issues to be addressed by bodies that are of a more specific nature. But I would say that the General Assembly has the characteristic of being the body where everybody sits on an equal footing.

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* The World Summit for Social Development, 6-10 March 1995, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

GOODMAN: Which is sometimes not a true reflection. I mean, people discussing disarmament -- not all 185 members are equal in their burden or arsenals of arms, if you like.

GREEN: But in terms of peace, they're all important.

GOODMAN: Yes, but some are going to be involved in -- some are more likely to be involved in warfare than others, aren't they?

GREEN: Well, yes, but, you know, the world has changed so much since the end of the cold war that we are seeing small countries, or countries that we consider to be small and therefore not with a tendency towards conflict or war -- those are the countries that we are dealing with now.

DERGHAM: But that's actually the point, that during the cold war you had countries gathering in regional organizations, you had the Organization of African Unity, for example, or the Non-Aligned Movement. They made blocks, and as blocks they made a difference in the General Assembly. Since then, there have been no such blocks, or at least these organizations are not very active, and in effect you have the General Assembly empty. Nobody pays attention to it, not only in the media but amongst diplomats. Is there a rescue out of the situation? At least, can you admit it first?

GREEN: But you know that the main containment of conflict in the past was exactly the existence of two super-Powers. Since that ended, what we now have is not the failure of the regional groups, but the fact that those conflicts cannot be contained any more, and they explode -- based on ethnicities, religions, and many other issues. But when you are referring to the Group of 77, for instance, or to the countries in the Non-Aligned Movement --

LITTLEJOHNS: The developing countries.

GREEN: -- The developing countries, they're still there -- they don't play probably as important a role as in the past, because in the past it was also the ideological division that was playing an important role, and there was also the possibility for one country to move from one block to the other and look for help, for assistance. And that doesn't exist any more.

DERGHAM: That's right, probably, that with the disintegration of the General Assembly's importance as it used to be -- I have been to 18 General Assemblies already, so I think it has deteriorated tremendously, the interest in it, and I think it has been quite pre-empted by the Security Council. Everybody sort of turns to where the Security Council is and says that's where the body that makes a difference exists. Nobody pays attention to the General Assembly any more. Do you think this is justified, or do you think there is a way to rectify the situation?

GREEN: I think that is not quite justified. Because I could probably think of many countries objecting to the idea that the General Assembly is not a main body any more, or is not a body that attracts attention any more, because many things happen in the General

Assembly. The General Assembly is always dealing with human rights, which is one of the issues that will go with us into the next century, probably, until we really have a very clean file in terms of human rights all over the world. And the General Assembly is dealing with the budgetary problems. The General Assembly is dealing with many issues that the Security Council is not involved in. The Security Council is involved basically in breaches of international peace and security. Those are the issues really under the attention of the Security Council. But I can think of many other issues as important as peace, such as development, that are dealt with in the General Assembly, or even other bodies, for instance, as you were saying.

GOODMAN: But why the General Assembly I think has declined in interest is that very largely during the cold war it was merely an arena for scoring points. It wasn't a place for solving problems, it was a place for scoring points for your side or against the other side. And now, hopefully, there's no need to score points on that basis any more.

GREEN: Well, if you keep on using these words, "solving problems", this expression, then maybe we are talking about two different things here. Because according to its mandate -- not only the General Assembly but also the Security Council -- it's limited as to what it can do in terms of solving problems. The Security Council cannot act unless the country accepts the action of the Security Council. That's one thing. Unless you are in a Chapter VII kind of activity, because there's really....

LITTLEJOHNS: An enforcement action.

GREEN: An enforcement action. And in the case of the General Assembly, we work on resolutions. And you know the resolutions are not legally binding. Of course, there is a school of thought that says that a resolution, by being repeatedly used or quoted, has the possibility of creating customary law. And I could go along with that school of thought. But really, because we're dealing with resolutions, because we're dealing really with recommendations, and because we're not dealing with a supra government here, with a supranational government here, then we are not bound to resolve problems, but to tackle problems and to see if the countries, the Member States, can really cooperate for the solution of those problems.

DERGHAM: Madame, could you allow me to expand this discussion beyond the General Assembly and the Security Council and its particularities. Let's just speak about where the United Nations is nowadays. It seems to be a low point for the United Nations after a lot of failures, a series of failures: in Bosnia, where the intervention for moral reasons has not seen fruit; there was a reversal of humanitarian intervention, as was the case in Somalia. The United Nations is packing up and leaving. It's a low point in the life of this Organization, do you not think so?

GREEN: We do have some success stories that you didn't refer to. And some of them are very --

DERGHAM: That's all right. But could we deal with those, and then we'll have time to speak of the successes?

GREEN: Some of them indeed, some of them are really very recent, like Mozambique, for instance. I mean, it was a few weeks ago, and it's very successful. The elections took place and everything is fine. And before it was Namibia, and of course it was Cambodia, and El Salvador. So we really have to keep a balance here. I understand what you're saying, and I would be willing to address that question about failure if we address the question in the sense that I proposed at the beginning of this talk. When we concentrate on peace-keeping operations, which is only 30 per cent of our activity, then of course you can tell me about Bosnia, and then of course you can tell me about Rwanda, and you can tell me about Somalia -- because you are concentrating only on the most publicized aspect of the United Nations. Tell me about efforts in terms of the environment, in terms of development, in terms of women, in terms of children.

DERGHAM: Well, they've become -- forgive me --

LITTLEJOHNS: I have a little chore to perform, excuse me. This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Rosario Green, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Raghida, go ahead.

DERGHAM: Yes. I just wanted to make the point that in Somalia, a number of people are still not -- they haven't established this institution building that you referred to earlier so that they could carry on a reasonable civil life. And in Bosnia there was no reversal of the Serbian aggression, and the [international] community is backtracking and speaking of how to sort of save itself in the situation. These are not minor issues. These are major issues, and it's very hard to tell somebody, "Excuse me, let's not talk about Somalia and Bosnia --

GREEN: I never said they were minor issues, of course.

DERGHAM: -- because there is something interesting happening on the social level somewhere."

GREEN: I don't believe that we consider those minor issues at all. In Somalia we haven't been able to do any institution building because there's no government. When we were in Somalia there was no government at all, so we didn't have a counterpart. We're trying to do institution building in Haiti now because we have a government -- President Aristide is back. And I don't have a crystal ball, but I think that we stand a better chance there than we ever did in Somalia. Bosnia: Bosnia is a tremendous failure of the international community, not only the United Nations. You know, it's the Contact Group, it's NATO, it's also the United Nations. It's a terrible war going on, a very complex one. And I wouldn't like to give up hope.

We're still trying to be of use in terms of humanitarian assistance, at least, because people are suffering a lot. So --

LITTLEJOHNS: And of course Bosnia has been a Security Council question rather than a General Assembly question. So....

GREEN: Yes, because it's a breach of international peace and security. And so is -- Haiti was discussed, of course, in the Security Council. In Guatemala, on the contrary, we have a mediation process going on, and I hope that is going well; my information is that it is going well. It's a General Assembly issue. With human rights --

GOODMAN: A cynic might say that some of these problems, particularly those which have been developing recently in the Caucasus and perhaps even in the Balkans, are partly a result of the fact that the United Nations played a very great effort, made great emphasis on decolonization, but only as it affected the Western Powers. The Soviet decolonization was taboo. And then suddenly the Soviet Union fell apart, and all these nationalities, especially on its soft underbelly in the south, are up in arms against one another, some against Moscow. And this may be also the answer to what's happening in the Balkans. So, in a sense, the UN has been hoist on its own petard on that.

GREEN: Well, Soviet decolonization, as you refer to the fact that there was a Soviet Union, was never a part of the agenda. I mean --

GOODMAN: No, exactly, that's the point I'm making.

GREEN: But I'm not so sure it should have been part of the agenda.

GOODMAN: But the Soviet empire happened to be contiguous --

GREEN: Well, the Soviet Union was a country, and it was a member of the United Nations, and I hardly can see how we could have dealt with the Soviet Union in the way that you are proposing.

GOODMAN: Because many of the Soviet Republics were acquired about the same time that the Western Powers acquired their empire, but the Western Powers' empires were overseas, and the Soviet empire was contiguous. All of the southern part of the Soviet Union was acquired in the 19th century, not to mention the eastern European parts of it, which were acquired in the 20th century, like Estonia and Latvia.

GREEN: But what I'm telling you is that it was never an issue subject to the decolonization authority in this house --

GOODMAN: Right.

GREEN: -- because it was never presented as an issue. You know, the African decolonization, the Asian decolonization, and even the decolonization process that took part in several parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, they were issues. There was a recognized --

what? -- *metrópoli*,* and they were recognized by the international community as members of that *metrópoli*, and eventually an independence process took place, in many ways, sometimes peacefully, sometimes not so peacefully. And that's the role, the important role that the United Nations played around the '50s and the '60s. But I don't -- for me, it's very difficult to see a comparison between --

GOODMAN: Latvia? The Baltic states? Were they not colonies?

GREEN: Well, they're independent now.

GOODMAN: Now they are. That's the point I'm making.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Green, my colleagues are being a little negative, shall we say, about the General Assembly. Tell us about some of the particularly interesting resolutions, the positive things that have come out of this General Assembly so far.

GREEN: Well, you know, a positive thing is always to refer to the Third Committee, for instance, which is the Committee of the General Assembly --

LITTLEJOHNS: Social and Economic Committee.

GREEN: No, the Third Committee is Human Rights.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Human Rights Committee, that's right.

GREEN: And just to see that because of the pressure of the international community, the interest of the international community, some progress is being achieved in the realm of human rights. I guess that cheers us up. I mean, that really gives us -- at least in my case -- gives room for optimism. Also in terms of the Second Committee, which is the Social and Development Committee: some progress was achieved there. And, as I was telling you, a discussion, a very interesting discussion on the Agenda for Development took place in that committee, and not only on development but other social issues also. The fact that the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was declared -- to me it's very important, maybe because as a Mexican I am the result of this mixture of cultures, you know, the indigenous culture and the Spanish culture. But, you know, it's very important. So those are important achievements that we have to look at.

DERGHAM: It seems that the United Nations might have a problem with their new Congress, the American Congress, that is. You will be advising the Secretary-General on political affairs and different matters. Do you feel there is a way to bring the American Congress and the United Nations to cooperate and work better together, to explain to the American public that the United Nations is not peace-keeping exclusively, that peace-keeping is only 30 per cent of it, and then do you think that you could win the Congress to your side?

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* Home country.

GREEN: I don't know if we could win the Congress to our side, but I think that's a task that we have to undertake. We have to go down to Washington, and we have to talk to them and just lobby, as any country does, or any group of interests does, and convince them that we need the help of countries. And the United States, being one of the largest contributors, has to keep on helping the United Nations, because this happens to be the institution that is all in favour of peace and security at the world level.

DERGHAM: But in your mind have you understood what is the role of the United Nations? Is it to fill the vacuum, or is it to support a certain emerging of a block or a country? Have you, in your mind, arrived at what the UN should do now in terms of the post-cold war period, in light of the failures of humanitarian intervention, moral intervention, and should we be humble in expecting and anticipating what this body can do? Have you arrived at a vision of what the UN can do in the post-cold war era?

GREEN: Yes, but you know, I don't agree with your idea of filling a vacuum. We've been there for 50 years now. I mean, we have our place. There is a place of our own. And I don't mean to sound arrogant, but we were created because we were needed. So we don't have to fill any vacuum. We're there, and I believe that we will continue to be there. And we know that, after the end of the cold war, there was an evolution, not only at the level of countries, but also at the level of organizations. So we are analyzing constantly what is the role of the UN for the future.

But I would like you to understand that it's not up to the Secretariat only to decide what the role of the United Nations is going to be for the future. It's something that we have to share with the Member States. Because, you know, people tend to have an idea of the United Nations as autonomic, independent, by itself, but we are 185 countries and a Secretariat serving those 185 countries. We cannot move independently from the will of the countries. But yes, we are in a permanent dialogue with the countries. We try to get their advice, their opinions, and we produce many reports. And we try to get their answers, to seek guidance. And together the international community and the United Nations design the role for the United Nations for the century to come.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Green, you spoke about the end of the cold war. Are you convinced that the cold war is really at an end? Because not very long ago we had a veto in the Security Council by Russia for the first time in quite a long time. And there's a tendency now -- the Budapest Conference turned out to be a bit of a disaster. Are you seeing any reflection of the growth of tensions between East and West, or whatever you want to call it, in the General Assembly?

GREEN: The cold war was much more than that. The cold war was much more than just tensions between the East and the West. It was also the threat of nuclear war. It was also

an ideological war. I mean, there were many, many things involved in this concept. And I believe that going back to the cold war is just a thought.

Probably we are going to see tensions growing on certain issues and tensions easing on certain other issues. But I see a Security Council where there is more cooperation than veto. You know, many, many resolutions in the Security Council have passed unanimously, or there's a country or two that did not vote for the resolution but did not use the veto. For instance, this Russian veto that you referred to, it's a very recent one, and it's not something that is very commonly happening these days. So I believe that the Security Council shows a lot of cooperation, and of course, some tensions too. Because the world is still undergoing a transformation. We still don't know what kind of a world we're going to have at the end of this century.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Green, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Rosario Green, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. She was interviewed by Anthony Goodman of Reuters and Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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